LILY SAMPSON

POEMS FOUND

THE AUSTRALIAN SALVATION ARMY'S GREATEST POET.

COMPILED BY PAUL FARTHING
FORWARD BY ROSY KEANE

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(Cover colorised by Sandy Turnbull).

The highest compliment one can be paid, in my belief, are in the words of a dear retired Colonel friend, ‘She knows him, of whom she speaks’.

Reading the works of Lily Sampson is like reading the day’s toil in sweat upon the brow of a faithful labourer. She has seen the eternal harvest, and set down in prophetic poetry the words of its reaping.

With tears and with joy, she knows him, our beautiful Jesus,
of whom she speaks. Set time aside today in the busy, frenetic pace of life to parse out deep meaning from her words all these years later, for;

‘This is of life the seal,
This is of death the token,
That which has life will heal;
Only dead things stay broken.‘

- Rosy Keane

This little book seeks to avert a minor tragedy - the loss of the Australian Salvation Army's finest poet, Lily Sampson.

Sampson's poem "As the Varied Way of Life we Journey" has been preserved in the Salvation Army Songbook but her other poems were scattered throughout old War Crys, dusty magazines and forgotten anthologies. Here they are brought together with graphics and fonts taken from those old publications.

Be warned. This is not pleasant poetry. Sampson is never sentimental or sweet. She wrestles with her will and warns against the wicked tongue.
She bemoans stagnation in the Salvation Army and fears the loss of its spiritual purpose. Even a poem about her mother comforting her as a baby avoids platitudes. She aches and yearns throughout.

But this is not sad poetry. In every messy exploration she finds Jesus.
Again and again she finds Jesus. Jesus the “living vine”, Jesus the “absolute perfection of God's love”, Jesus the one in whom the light of God is pent.

- Paul Farthing

PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERING

The glorious, the Everlasting son,
  By His great shining hidden from man's sight,
All-glorious did imperfectly reveal
To limited and frail, imperfect man
The absolute perfection of God's love.

The Son, the Flawless, suffered sin for man
  When hands and feet and side and head were marred.
When agonies of death encompassed Him.
Broken and suffering the Son fulfilled
The task of the Revealer of that love

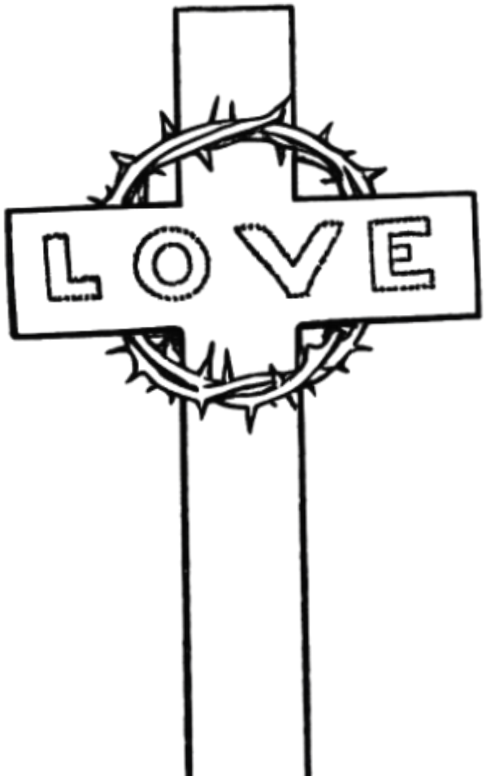
To man; whose eyes are plagued and marred by sin
Unable to receive the blinding truth,
The unutterable glory of the love of God.

In Christ's own suffering body, and His mind
Hemmed in, beset by human frailty
That light is pent and shaded to such strength
That man may gaze-all through his life may gaze
And through eternity he still will gaze
And marvel at the love of God revealed.

Shall eyes grow stronger in that healing light?
Until, more perfect, they can bear more light?
And in eternity, bear still more light?
Shall ever the sufferings of the Son be done
And man no longer need its mercy-screen,
Until, with eyes like Christ's, at last he looks
And sees the Saviour as He truly is?
Shall ever hands and side and feet be whole,
And whole again the brow that wore the thorns?
Or shall those marks endure eternally,
Perfection in their lone imperfectness?

THAT WHICH HAS LIFE WILL HEAL

FROM the crushed buttercup
Rises the new pale shootlet;
From the sad heart springs up
Hope, out of love's last rootlet.
But when the bowl is smashed,
Lacking a hand to mend it,
Lies it just where it crashed,
That smashing once will end it.
This is of life the seal,
This is of death the token,
That which has life will heal;
Only dead things stay broken.



GRANT ME THY PEACE

SUN, go not down upon my wrath tonight!
Though I am wounded in unequal fight!
Unheard my cause, denied my common right!
O Holy Spirit, O most gentle Dove,
Of this dread mood my being must be shriven..
All deep resentments from my spirit driven,
Grant me Thy peace, — forgiving and forgiven!

Justice I seek not. I have deeper need.
Grant me Thy healing where I inly bleed,
And my drowned eyes to eternal visions lead,
O Holy Spirit, O most gentle Dove!
No human soul can live in bitterness.
Love, Love Divine, quench this burning distress.
In floods of Thine own love, and give me peace.

The peace of God, in which to newly rise
To a new life within Thy counsels wise,
A little child in his new paradise.
O Holy Spirit, O most gentle Dove,
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth
As it is done in Heaven. In this new birth
From Thee, of Thee, to Thee, my life has worth.

LOST WINE

SO much lost wine!
The skin of custom; rules; the close cohesion
Of habit, be it written or encased
In living skin, in venerable skull,
Is good, is very good for old ideas;
Is old wine's suitable custodian,
Unstretchable, set hard.

A new idea is a living thing,
And of itself its own expanding force.
Within it are its own enthusiasms,
Ready to persevere until its shape
Is moulded by the press of circumstance,
Necessity and zeal.
So it is recognised.

FORCE this new wine into the old wineskin,
Then so much wine is lost.
Enthusiasms, joy,
Spontaneous and willing effort spilled
For what?
For pride of those who owned the old.

WITH LIFE A GIFT

WITH life a gift is given to me,
  Most blessed and most awful gift, my will,
The pivot on which turns, for good or ill,
My soul's eternal destiny.

The power, so dangerous, to choose
Wrong before right, sockets instead of eyes;
Frustration's paths instead of paradise,
And never know the bliss I lose.

Yet I have will! Freewill alone
Begets the willing love that love inspires,
Chooses, for love of good, as God desires,
And makes God's high, pure joy my own.

SHE WAS HIS ANVIL

SHE was his anvil made all Womanwise
For her high task; his wife.
Beside the furnace of his daily toil
Mis red-hot projects slowly took their shape
Under the hammer of his active mind.
He hammered them on hers and she withstood,
The temper of her steel proved by the shock.
And slowly, as he wrought and she stood fast,
The things, the plans he made took on her form;
And cooled and useful went out fit to serve.

She was his anvil, of such wise design
Such hardened precious steel, true confidante;
He was her hammer-each in need of each
To fashion horseshoes, gates and wheels for all.

YET REMAINS LOVE

WE do not see, by human woe surrounded.
    We do not feel, pressed down by many a weight.
Nor for a time we stumble and we follow
Faint hope and faith, like children in the night.
Yet remains love as from the first, unchanging,
Till hope is turned to joy and faith to sight.

The common lot of man lays on our shoulder
The mortal hand of sad reality.
The floods passed over, gone is now our treasure
As ships are lost upon an angry sea.
Yet remains love, the rock amid the tempest
Outliving time into eternity.

Creatures of time, we suffer and we sorrow.
Here faithful hearts and hands know parting pain.
Yet remains love, the great I am, forever
And those who love in Him will meet again.
For God is love, eternal, ever present,
And at the end all conquering love will reign.

LET ME ABIDE TILL SPRING

CHRIST, Thou Living Vine, who first for me
Didst bear in faith Thy trial of suffering,
Give me Thy faith, let me abide in Thee-
A branch of Thee, O Vine! a living thing,
To be revealed in spring.

Now sadly do I stand, pruned back and back;
So much of what I prized lies on the ground
Like useless wood, cut off and turning black.
Stripped and ashamed the purged branch is found,
Waiting the time of spring.

Although 'tis winter time, and bitter frost
Gleams on the mutilated branch; nor now
Can I see what would justify the cost
Of twigs and branchlets which I toiled to grow:
Let me have faith-till spring.

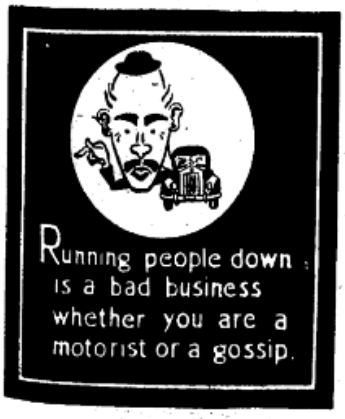
Till all the life upsurging from the Vine—
Diverted by His knife into His plan—
Fulfil all that which now in bright design
Lies in the heart of the Great Husbandman;
Let me abide till spring.

LITTLE RED INCENDIARY

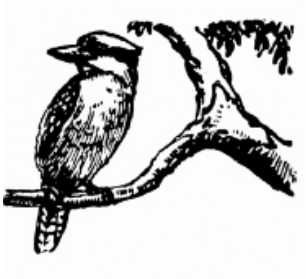
THIS little red incendiary
  Police will never catch!
One sees the smouldering ruins
But not the little match.
Anonymous the firebug goes
With hypocrite's bland word;
"They say that," "Everybody knows,"
"So sad"and "Have you heard?"

To such innocuous remarks
As "someone told me first"
Pure malice adds a match-head lie
Or half a truth-the worst!
A match-head guaranteed to strike
And to create a flame,
Which, uncontrolled, will spread around
To blacken some fair name.

This little red incendiary,
This loose unbridled tongue,
Will stretch into a noose one
day To get its owner hung.
Or, having perished in the grave,
The soul that wielded it
Will find, at God's white throne, a list
Of all the fires it lit.



WE knew her in her eventide-
A rose; full blown, and waiting; spread
To pour its fragrance far and wide,
Such Christlike influence she shed.
... The flower has fallen on the grass
Into dark sleep, where each flower goes.
Yet the blind night winds stir and pass,
Filled with the odour of the Rose



If you are well and strongly shod,
With carefree tread you choose
To walk on stones and shells and sod;
But just leave off your shoes!
And slowly, painfully, you'll tread
on things that cut and bruise.

Prayer-guarded, every soul may stride
Along life's thoroughfare,
Its stings and stones and pricks defied;
But just leave off your prayer!
And your slow, crippled soul will tread
on danger everywhere.

NO mountain voice was mine, no angel wings,
No music, and no flaming bush in sight!
No earthquake and no Sinai thunderings
As when God called those prophet souls of might.
These were not mine. I only saw the children
Without a hand to guide their feet aright.
I only saw the aged poor, the lonely
Without a Saviour, groping in the night.
"I'm just a common soul" I said to Jesus,
My dear Redeemer and my Saviour, Jesus,
"May such as I serve Thee, O Lord of Light?"

(a reflection on her calling to officership)

A QUARTER of a century has gone.
In statecraft, gracious womanhood and joy;
The young queen, by her acts most faithfully
Adhering to her vows, has constantly
With diligence and dedication true
Shown her deep reverence for those truths that shine
More bright than earthly jewels in her crown,
A steadfast star mid swift, tumultuous change.

(Written for Queen Elizabeth's Jubilee)

THE CANDLESTICK

It was made in she wilderness
From the gold of Egypt,
By the instruction of Jehovah
And the enabling of the Spirit.

Its sevenfold light illuminated the holy place
In all the journeyings of the tabernacle.

It was brought with rejoicing to Zion;
It burned steadily in the temple of Solomon.
Through the lifetimes of the kings it burned
Before the Lord,
Until in their disobedience i bas forsaken
Then they went in chains to Babylon
And sweeping and shouting, groaning and laughter
The remnant lit a flickering shadow of the first
And it prospered. Other hands made anew
The candlestick of gold, the former ancient one.
Other hands raised a temple, and in the Holy Place
The Seven branched candlestick was its light.

Then the-One sent from God was rejected.
The temple, veil was rent.
The light went out.
And Jerusalem fell before pagan Rome.

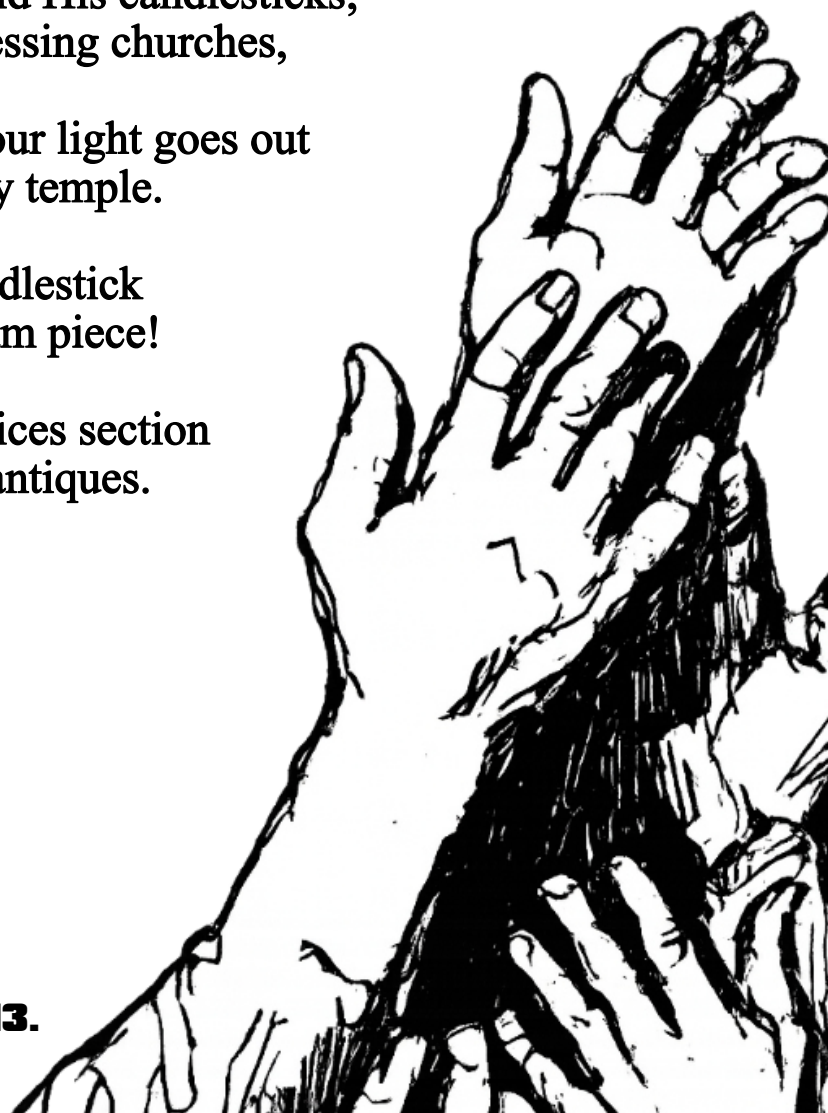
THE CANDLESTICK (CONTINUED)

They carried the seven-branched candlestick
In triumph through the streets of Rome!
Solid, pure gold! Exquisitely wrought!
Full of history; valuable:
Look! Look at the daylight on its glittering buds!
On its branches!
Judge its weight by the number of slaves who carry it.
What a museum piece for the caesar!
Carve its image in the stone of his triumphal arch!

For the light has gone out of it...
The shekinah is no more.

The Spirit walks today amid His candlesticks;
He says today to His witnessing churches,
"You are My candlesticks!
If your witness dies and your light goes out
I will remove you from My temple.

"If you will not be My candlestick
You shall become a museum piece!
A thing of culture,
Admired in the social services section
Of mankind's museum of antiques.



THE JAVELIN

THE craftsmen chose his
timber carefully;
Straight, strong, fine grained.
With it he carved a slender shaft,
Imperceptibly tapering,
Perfectly round.
The shaft was finished with
much labouring.
Flawless, like glass,
Its grain shone richly through.
its shining spearhead, balanced exactly,
Was cunningly fixed, fast.

But not for admiration was it wrought,
Polished and fair,
to adorn some palace wall;
On a dark battlefield, Blood-stained,
Shattered in victory;
That was its end.

Oh dare I think upon Isaiah's words
And pray this prayer:
"Make me a polished shaft,
By Thee, Great Craftsman, counted fit
For desperate need?”

O perfect Javelin of God,
Shivered on calvary in slaying And death,
Help us to look at Thee and so believe
That victory is in the making now.

(Isaiah 49:2)

THE SOCIAL OFFICER

ONE of the crowd, with hard, red hands,
With tired eyes and aching heels,
One of the blue-clad crowd she stands,
One of the lowly crowd she kneels.
For love of her Christ died to save—
For love of Christ she is His slave.

One of the crowd. Who knows that she
Had buried hopes of ease and fame?
One of the crowd, her drudgery
Made glorious by one holy name.
For love of her Christ died to save
For love of Christ she is His slave.

DEAR PRIESTESS OF THE DARK

UPON thy face thy candle shone its intimate gold ray
On aureoled hair and gentle brow and tender eyes alway,
As through the night thy soft feet fell in the dim pool of light,
Thou, sleeping, heardst and, waking, came to me through
childhood's night,
Dear priestess of the dark!

From thy clear eyes a holy light beamed on youth's wakening;
On every step of untried life, on each new, unknown thing;
On every place of ignorance where sin and folly wait;
Down all dim ways and dangerous thy love would penetrate—
Dear priestess of the dark!

Faithful and self-forgetful, thou hast always come to me;
Now, like a beacon on a hill, shineth this memory:
Thy face in candlelight, thy prayers, thy words, thy tender
hands;
Mother! I have found God at last-drawn by thy love-spun
bands,
Dear priestess of the dark!

LIGHT FOR HIS COMING

SAWN branch for lamp-stand, light-bowl of clay,
  Hastily loaned to the Nazareth folk;
Cheap wick and oil, set high o'er the hay,
  Fitfully burning when Mary awoke.

Light for His coming! In the soft glow
  Jesus was born, bringing heaven to earth;
Light for the Christ Child! Shepherds bow low,
  Scanning His features, glad at His birth.

Better that lamp-stand, sawn branch and clay,
  Wick burning gently revealing His face,
Than the bejewelled lamps of today
  Lighting in splendour a rich, empty place.

Like the rude vessel, unnoticed, unknown,
  I would be clay—if men kneel at His feet,
Holding a light by which Jesus is shown,
  Then shall my joy and my life be

HEALING

TODAY I heard a note, soft as an echo,
From a string I thought irreparably broken,
There had been no sound so long.
Nothing could awaken it, silenced by a blow;
Nor praise nor blame, nor beauty nor scholarship.
Long since I said to the beautiful, ' Forgive me
That I have no answering note.
By your utter loveliness and my unresponse
I learn that the string is sundered.'
•.. Today I heard it, unsought, elusive.
Wondering, I said, ' Surely, spider-fine though it be—
There stretches, whole again,
That spirit aerial of mine Which alone can capture
That long note,
Which could not come from any other string?
... I heard it, recognised it, lost it.
But hope arose to follow the faint vibration
Knowing the string of the long silent lyre restored.
I shall hear that note again
When beauty strikes the string.
Scholarship will play marches on it;
It cannot escape the harsh discords of unspoken blame,
Nor the rare bitter-sweetness of praise,
But these I welcome, that I may, on rare occasions,
Hear the note I once believed was lost.